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**PAYING MORE THAN LIP SERVICE**  
**TO OUR NATION'S VETERANS**

Since the establishment of the Continental Army during the American Revolution, brave men and women have put on our nation's uniform and put themselves in harm's way on our behalf. Each year on Memorial Day, we pause to honor those of them who paid the ultimate price in our defense.

As we honor them, we must also remember the twenty-four million living veterans and the hundreds of thousands of brave men and women serving in Iraq, Afghanistan, and around the world today.

Unfortunately, it's become all too common to salute our veterans while the band plays, and

then forget about them when the music stops.

That's simply unacceptable.

Their sacrifices, and those of our military families, are freedom's foundation; and we have an obligation to provide them more than lip service. We must live up to our promise of care.

As the Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, I've made it my top priority to ensure that we do live up to that promise.

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) estimates they will treat more than 5.8 million patients next year, including more than a quarter million veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. Thanks to modern science and technology, many of those patients are recovering from injuries they once would not have survived. But care for severe injuries, like traumatic brain injuries from blast waves, loss of limbs and other severe traumas, are leaving a legacy that the military and veterans' health care systems are struggling to deal with.

That's why when I took over the Chairmanship in January, and had to complete the domestic budget for this year that the previous Congress had failed to pass, my first priority was veterans' healthcare. We added over \$3.5 billion to help VA facilities around the country deal with the

increasing number of patients, and focused resources on dealing with the mental and physical injuries – like traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder – that our troops are coming home with.

Next year we intend to do even more. This week, my military construction subcommittee passed the recommendation of Congressman Chet Edwards and myself to provide the largest single increase in funding for the VA in the agency's seventy-seven year history. Our Committee's plan provides \$3.8 billion more than the President requested and \$6.7 billion more than the VA received this year.

Increasing the VHA budget by more than 13% will improve the delivery of medical services, reduce backlogs for benefits claims, and will provide almost \$900 million more than last year to perform maintenance and renovations of existing VA facilities. It would also almost double the budget for VA hospital construction, allowing the agency fulfill its plans to serve veterans through a more rational network of clinics and medical centers.

The budget measure also follows up on earlier legislation I supported to improve efforts to provide mental health care and prevent suicide among our combat veterans by requiring that three Centers of Excellence on Mental Health and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder are fully funded and operational next year, and by encouraging cooperation between the VA and the Department of Defense to ensure that military personnel returning to civilian life don't fall through the cracks.

It is worth remembering that on the battlefield, the military pledges to leave no soldier behind. When they return home, that pledge becomes ours. The best way fulfill that pledge is to provide veterans the care they need and a helping hand as they return to civilian life.

Paying lip service to our veterans may be fine, but providing real health care services to meet their needs is what really counts. When we do that, we make every day Memorial Day.

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